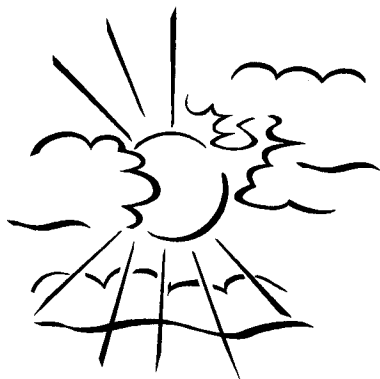


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Monday, May 8, 2006

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Man in Maxey assault

By Lisa Roose-Church
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

A Livingston County jury acquitted a former W.J. Maxey Boys Training School employee Thursday of assault and battery charges for rough treatment of an 18-year-old resident at the Green Oak Township facility.

Tanner Lorenzo Robinson, 33, of Detroit, was charged for an incident on Dec. 15, when he confronted the 18-year-old for taking contraband to class. But a six-person jury found that his actions were not assault and battery.

During the trial, a facility supervisor testified that Robinson did not use proper restraint techniques when using a "choke hold" to restrain the resident.

Robinson agreed that wrapping his arm around the man's neck and pulling him to ground, then holding him down by pressing a knee on his chest and neck area are not approved restraint techniques at Maxey.

However, Robinson said, "I did what was necessary."

Robinson faced 93 days in jail if he had been convicted.

The 18-year-old testified that he was preparing to go to morning classes when Robinson stopped him and accused him of taking contraband to class. The contraband was college applications and personal letters. However, other staff testified that college materials are not considered contraband.

After a verbal exchange that included the younger man swearing at Robinson, the 18-year-old said he walked toward the door but "got pulled back by my neck."

"All I felt was something around my neck," the 18-year-old said. "I was on the ground with my head hitting the ground."

A tape, which District Judge A. John Pikkarainen would not allow the jury to see, depicts Robinson grabbing the youth from behind in a choke hold and throwing him to the tile floor. The younger man's head bounced against the floor. The 18-year-old suffered no major injuries but did have some bruising and a golf-sized knot on his head, according to testimony.

Pikkarainen excluded the tape, saying it was "not in context."

Robert Byrnes, a shift supervisor at Maxey, said he trained Robinson to use proper

techniques when restraining youths at the facility.

When assistant prosecutor Shawn Ryan asked Byrnes if Robinson's actions were in keeping with the department's training policy, Byrnes replied, "No, it is not."

Byrnes said the 18-year-old was restrained falling backwards, and the staff member put his knee on the youth's body — both actions are prohibited.

Robinson testified that his intent was to "create a safe environment." He said the 18-year-old was disobeying an order to leave, and that when youths leave a room without permission, it is considered going "AWOL" or escaping. He said this is a concern because the 18-year-old is housed in the special needs area, and those youths are considered to be more violent.

Robinson said he was concerned about allowing the 18-year-old in the hallway with two female staff and other youths while he was in an agitated state.

In her closing argument, the prosecutor said the 18-year-old was "taken down in a sneak attack from behind," and that Robinson used excessive force because the younger man was not doing what the defendant wanted.

Robinson's attorney, David Zoglio, argued his client did what he had to do.

"Restraints happen at Maxey all the time," Zoglio said. "Sometimes (the youths) get bruised. Sometimes they get injuries. ... My client did what he had to do.

"A little bit of a rough restraint is not enough for assault and battery," Zoglio said.

Originally published May 5, 2006

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Published May 7, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Tough love: Juvenile offenders say some discipline goes too far

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

One boy laughed while refusing to shovel snow.

Another mocked his counselors, repeating everything they said and refusing to quiet down so his bunkmates could sleep.

A third teen punched his teacher in the eye and then bit the teacher's chest as the teacher held his arms.

Such frustrating, sometimes violent scenes are common in Michigan's juvenile detention and treatment centers. Dealing with defiant young offenders is made even more difficult by a vague state rule that gives little guidance on how to handle the situations - at least not until a mistake is made.

Unlike most government-regulated industries, Michigan has no clear outline of what is and is not accepted when restraining out-of-control kids in youth institutions.

A state administrative rule simply prohibits "cruel and severe discipline" and "excessive chemical, mechanical or physical restraint."

Nowhere does it detail what that entails.

"It leaves too much open for interpretation, and



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when you have a lack of policy, there is more room for error," said Fred Woelmer, director of the Genesee Valley Regional Center and vice president of the Michigan Juvenile Detention Association. "It makes a difficult job even more difficult."

But for the first time in more than 30 years, that rule is up for review this summer by state officials.

Those in the juvenile justice field hope to see significant changes made.

Adding weight to their plea are recent problems at the beleaguered Camp Highfields in rural Ingham County where the three above scenarios played out earlier this year.

Counselors' reactions in two of those cases and another led to the suspension of the residential program in February and uncertainty about whether the program will continue.

"Clearly, mistakes were and are made," said Larry Miesner, an adjunct criminal justice professor at Michigan State University and former chief of Michigan's Bureau of Juvenile Justice. "But we need to try to correct those problems and develop policy or oversight to minimize those mistakes in the future."

Little room for error

There isn't much room for mistakes when dealing with emotionally fragile adolescents.

One wrong turn and these already troubled teens will be on a one-way path to prison, Miesner said.

"These kids frequently have been raised with violence," he said. "They see violence on the streets and are basically taught that you deal with stressful situations by being violent."

Treatment centers like Highfields in Onondaga and the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy in Battle Creek offer the chance to change that direction.

Teens in the juvenile justice system already have committed some type of crime.

Highfields, located about 20 miles south of Lansing, took in court-ordered boys ages 12 to 17 who had been convicted of a variety of offenses, including assault, property crimes, alcohol possession and truancy.

"We might be the last stop to turning a child's life around," said Reggie LaGrand, director of the Calhoun County Juvenile Home, another treatment center in Marshall.

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LaGrand's center and the Ingham County Youth Center on Jolly Road in Lansing take in even more violent youth who have been charged or convicted of everything from minor probation violations to attempted murder.

Youth counselors dealing with the troubled teens - some as large as professional fighters and often just as violent - are forced to make split-second decisions, weighing sometimes contradictory advice.

For example, some facilities say they are 100 percent hands-free and touch a child only if absolutely necessary to protect the child or others. But one person's definition of necessary may differ greatly from another's, leaving much to the discretion of workers who earn on average \$23,000 a year at Highfields.

They are required by law to have just 50 hours of training in their first year and 25 hours a year after that.

"It's not an easy job," said Scott Askegard of Mason, who worked as a house parent at Highfields in the early 1990s.

"Most people who work there do it because they want to help the kids."

Talk first

Doug Reimink has spent the past 24 years counseling kids and now supervises counselors at the Calhoun County center.

Like all such facilities, that center has a policy that restraint can be used only as a last resort. Talking is the primary method of diffusing a volatile situation.

"You have to get to know the kid, and once you do, you can sense when a problem is coming and how to handle it," Reimink said. "A lot of times these situations can be avoided if you take the time to talk to a kid."

But sometimes, force is needed, he said.

He had a situation about three months ago when a kid upset about a timeout started throwing punches and chairs at a counselor.

Reimink came up on the kid from behind and grabbed him in a big bear hug, technically known as an upper torso hold. The counselor left the room, and Reimink was able to calm the boy by talking to him about his problems.

"It wouldn't have done much good to use any more force than that," Reimink said. "And it wasn't needed."

James Gale, director of the Office of Children and Adult Licensing for the Michigan Department of Human Services, said good training at the agency level lets counselors know when and how to use restraint.

"You're going to have probably in facilities across the state on a regular basis children that are acting out," Gale said. "Staff have to make a decision on whether the child is at risk to himself or to others."

Each of Michigan's 225 facilities licensed to take in juvenile delinquents is expected to develop its own policies on using restraints, including mechanical devices, such as handcuffs and ankle shackles.

Most follow one of about a dozen behavior management programs. All call for verbal de-escalation first and restraint as a last resort, as does state law.

But, Woelmer said, lack of a clear standard on proper physical restraint can lead to problems for youth and staff safety as well as agency liability.

"It would be better and safer for everyone if there was something showing that a facility is using an approved method," he said. "It adds one more layer of approval to keep kids safe."

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.



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This juvenile home proposal might fly

Kalamazoo Gazette editorial

Monday, May 8, 2006

Is this the proposal taxpayers can live with? The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners is saying that it did indeed get the message after voters last year registered a resounding no to a \$91 million tax increase request to replace the decrepit juvenile home and overcrowded county jail. Voters rejected an average annual tax increase of \$99.

That was a scaled-back version of a \$148 million justice center that would have built a new jail, juvenile home and courts all on one campus, which voters turned down in 2002.

Certainly part of the reason voters rejected the last two property tax increase requests had a lot to do with the price tags.

But we suspect part of the reason at least some voters turned down these requests was because they don't place a high priority on spending millions for gleaming new facilities for criminals.

Now the county board is considering asking voters to increase their property taxes again - but, this time, only the juvenile home is on the table.

And the average cost to property taxpayers would be \$15 a year.

Anyone who has set foot in the juvenile home in recent years knows how very desperately it needs to be replaced.

The oldest wing was built in 1936 to house abused, neglected children. It is now being used as classroom space. The newer wing, which has 40 beds, needs updating. The roof is old. The plumbing needs to be replaced. Windows and locks are not secure.

It not a fitting place to house children, educate them, rehabilitate them and intervene in their lives.

County officials had considered a property tax increase that included additional money for renovations to the county's Family Court building on Gull Road.

But they've wisely scrapped that idea. Voters may be more willing to pay for a better home for kids if it isn't tied to a property tax increase to improve the court's digs.

At an average increase of \$15 a year, is the price finally right for voters?

It's hard to say. Local voters have been bombarded with requests to increase their property taxes.

Voters in the Kalamazoo Public Schools district last week said yes to paying more property taxes for a couple of new schools and building improvements. Voters in the Galesburg-Augusta school district said no to a plan for a new football stadium, high school auditorium and gym that would not have increased the amount of taxes they are paying.

And it's likely that county voters will be asked to approve a tax increase to support Metro Transit.

In the midst of all these requests, where will a new juvenile home rank on the voters' list of priorities?

It's too soon to tell, but this time county officials may succeed in raising the juvenile home higher on that list.

3 teens accused in death Manslaughter charged in purse snatching from woman, 92

FLINT TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Saturday, May 06, 2006

By Bryn Mickle
bmickle@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6383

FLINT TWP. - Three teenage boys will face involuntary manslaughter charges after an autopsy found an elderly Flint woman's death was caused by injuries she sustained in a purse snatching.

Mary A. Nash, 92, of died 11 days after police allege three boys robbed her March 29 as she walked to her car in a Flushing Road parking lot.

Nash lost her balance during the altercation and hit her head when she fell, officials said.

She died April 9 at McLaren Regional Medical Center. The Oakland County Medical Examiner's office ruled her death a homicide caused by blunt force trauma to the head, said Genesee County Prosecutor David S. Leyton.

Leyton said his office considered charging the teens with felony murder but decided there was no malice in the woman's death.

The youths, two 16-year-olds and a 15-year-old, are being held without bond at the Genesee Valley Detention Center. Their names are not being released because they are juveniles, said Leyton.

Prosecutors will ask Probate Judge Jennie E. Barkey to treat the teens as adults in the juvenile system.

A hearing is set for Wednesday.

If convicted, the teens could be sentenced as juveniles or adults or be given a blended sentence.

Each charge of involuntary manslaughter, unarmed robbery and conspiracy to commit unarmed robbery carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in custody.

Father Charged In Death Of Toddler

Boy Shot Himself In Face

POSTED: 11:59 am EDT May 8, 2006

The father of the 3-year-old boy who died from a shotgun wound to the face was charged on Monday.

Joseph Link of Detroit was charged with second-degree child abuse, felony firearms possession, and possession of marijuana, Local 4 reported.

The boy was in the Detroit home, located on Cheyenne Street, when he found a gun underneath the mattress and shot himself in the face on April 24.

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Hearing continues in baby's death

Testimony continued Friday at a preliminary hearing involving a Lansing man and woman charged with murder in the death of the woman's 2-year-old son, according to court officials.

Samuel Courtland, 31 and Cynthia Daniel, 30, face life in prison if convicted in the death of Daniel's son, Jalyn.

Last week, a jail inmate testified Samuel Courtland told him he was carrying his girlfriend's 2-year-old baby when the child fell out of his arms and hit the back of his head. The inmate also testified Courtland said he hit the child.

The hearing, to determine if the case will advance to trial, will continue at 9 a.m. May 19 in Lansing District Court.

Missing Boy Found Safe

Police Believe Family Member Took Child To School

POSTED: 8:59 am EDT May 8, 2006

UPDATED: 10:05 am EDT May 8, 2006

A child reported missing in Southfield on Monday morning has been found safe at school, according to police.

The boy's mother is believed to have left him in her car at a medical building near Providence Hospital and Nine Mile Road, Local 4 reported. When the mother returned to her vehicle, the child was gone.

Police believe a family member may have taken the boy to school.

Southfield police continue to investigate.

Stay with Local 4 News and ClickOnDetroit.com for the latest developments.

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Sheriff: Girls Approached By Stranger In Rochester Hills

Authorities Say Similar Incidents Occurred In Recent Weeks

POSTED: 3:03 pm EDT May 5, 2006

Authorities are investigating more reports of a stranger approaching children in Rochester Hills.

Two 12-year-old Rochester Hills girls said they were approached by a man in a car Wednesday at about 2:40 p.m. while walking home from school.

The girls were on a pathway behind a store at Harrison and Eastern streets when the man drove by them and said "Hi," according to the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. The man turned around and again approached the girls and said "Hi" once more. He motioned for the girls to come toward him, the sheriff's department reported.

The girls fled to an uncle's home, and the uncle contacted the sheriff's department. Several patrol cars searched the area for the man, but he was not located.

"Our message is getting out to children and parents as evidenced by the correct actions taken by these girls. They did the right thing," said Sheriff Michael Bouchard.

A composite sketch was drawn of the man. He is described as white, in his 30s, medium height, heavy set, with a partially bald head, a thin mustache and beard stubble on his chin.

The man's car was described as a red sedan, possibly a Pontiac Grand Am, the sheriff's department said. It is believed to have a Michigan "bridge" license plate with blue along the top and white along the bottom and a small sun. An American flag decal is on the lower portion of the windshield on the passenger's side, according to the sheriff's department.

The sheriff's department said the incident occurred in the same area where a man approached girls twice before in recent weeks.

Anyone with information on the incident should contact the Oakland County Sheriff's Department at (888) TURN-1-IN.

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Published May 7, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Epling: Bullying bill gets to the root of school violence

We must step up to change the culture within our schools

How many empty chairs will it take?

I applaud the Lansing State Journal for reporting on the issue of bullying in our schools and the positive outcomes of anti-bullying programs. But I am baffled at your stance that a law requiring schools to practice preventive behavior is unnecessary.

Has the editorial staff actually read the bill? Have you asked any schools to provide copies of their codes for review before taking this stance? Your readers deserve to know.

The bill, "Matt's Safe School Law," mandates and outlines specific content, wording and concepts that schools must use, but it also provides provisions that the community - schools, parents, police - not the state, create the final policies.

To schools that already have programs, I commend them; they should serve as mentors for other districts. But we cannot forget the children in schools without policies; those are the students we as a society must empower.

We now require a statewide curriculum, we have mandated lockdown drills in case of emergencies, yet we won't step up to decrease a root cause of violence in our schools. We must begin to change the culture within our schools. Research shows that learning and safety go hand in hand; a safer environment is a better learning environment.

As you noted, some victims of bullying strike back at their attackers, others turn the pain on themselves. The outlook for bullies is similarly bleak: In a recent study 30 percent to 40 percent of school bullies have three or more criminal convictions by age 24, compared to 10 percent of non-bullies. The truth is on paper and on tombstones that bullying not only hurts, it kills.

You noted that the Michigan Department of Education is looking at anti-bullying guidelines. Schools could start with what they set forth in June 2001 in their "model" Student Code of Conduct (page five, Level II Violation). Then the real question becomes: Have schools adopted the whole code, just pieces or ignored it altogether? They've had

five years to implement this, but have they done it? Almost seven years after Columbine, why are schools just now starting programs?

This topic needs more discussion, but I have been informed by one senator that there is no proof we need this law and that he sees no need to call a hearing for such discussion. How odd that one person can make a personal choice that affects all of us.

Maybe if this legislation had passed when originally introduced by Sen. Thomas in 2001, anti-bullying programs would have started. And just maybe a young man would have been told the consequences of his actions and would not have driven across East Lansing and assaulted my son just for the fun of it. And just maybe my son, Matt, would be graduating with his classmates in June.

And for those who think that adopting effective, overdue legislation to protect our children isn't needed, I invite you over to dinner, and you can sit across from the empty chair at my table.

Kevin Epling lives in East Lansing.

Finding a Cure for Jobs Pain

Michigan needs to launch health care solutions

May 8, 2006

Jobs and health care are inextricably linked. With an employment-based system, the more jobs, the more people have coverage. Yet as health care costs rise, the more employers shell out for coverage, the less eager they are to expand payrolls.

Clearly, many health care issues need to be addressed at the national level and should be high on the agenda when the bosses of the domestic auto industry meet, finally, this month with President George W. Bush. But in the meantime, states such as Michigan, with a million uninsured residents, cannot afford to do nothing. Even if you are employed and insured, your state and federal tax dollars are going to those who are not, so this is everybody's problem, including our well-covered state legislators.

Both Michigan and Massachusetts are aiming at universal coverage. Massachusetts is further along; Michigan needs to get moving. If Gov. Jennifer Granholm's plan isn't the answer, it is at least a starting point. Whatever the state does, employers will still pick up most of the tab and are continuing to shift more of the expense onto workers and to cut costs wherever possible. They've tried to change behavior that drives up bills, from offering weight-loss programs to firing employees who won't quit smoking.

Some of these are smart ventures, others more foolhardy. None is comprehensive. Even the best ideas bantered around Washington -- such as former presidential candidate John Kerry's plan to get the government to underwrite catastrophic care for those covering all employees' health -- aren't the same as universal care. But there would be real savings and, again, it's a place to start.

So is letting small businesses and individuals pool their risks and resources, as the Massachusetts plan does. There is also merit in creating portable, electronic health records that could save precious time -- and money -- in emergency rooms. Your life, your medical history, in a chip on a card. Is there an entrepreneur in Michigan waiting for encouragement to pioneer such a system?

Whatever happens in health care, the federal government's messy Medicare prescription program demonstrated too well that the best systems are centralized and simple, set up with people in mind ahead of health care providers and insurance companies.

It is too bad that this country did not tackle health care when its economy was cooking -- and before costs had climbed so much. What a blown opportunity. Now the need is acute, nowhere more so than Michigan.

What's keeping us from leading the way? Opportunity knocks. Jobs will follow.

MISSION ONE: MORE JOBS

- This week the Free Press editorial pages will be exploring the critical need for Michigan to create more jobs if it is going to survive. It's not only about economics, either. Come back all week as we explore:

Jobs and health care: Today

Jobs and education: Tuesday

Jobs and crime: Wednesday

Jobs and the environment: Thursday

Read previous installments at www.freep.com/opinion.

HEALTH CARE FACTS

- More than 1.1 million Michiganders lack coverage -- 12.7% of the statewide population, 13.4% in metro Detroit.
- Nearly 46 million Americans, one in seven, have no coverage, including 8.3 million children.
- Eight out of 10 uninsured people are in working families.
- By age, the group most likely to lack insurance is 21- to 24-year-olds. More than 35% are uninsured.

For more information, go to www.covertheuninsured.org.

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Medicare sign-up deadline nears

Seniors advised to enroll before 15th

May 8, 2006

BY KATIE MERX

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITE

If you are eligible for the new Medicare prescription drug plan and want to enroll, hop to it. Procrastination might be costly.

The deadline is May 15, a week from today.

If you sign up before then, your benefits will begin June 1 and that's the first month you'll pay for.

But if you don't enroll by May 15, you won't be eligible for Medicare drug benefits again until Jan. 1, and you'll pay a penalty once you do enroll.

"I've been telling people to pretend the deadline is on the 10th," said Mary Johnson, Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program director.

Local counseling agencies are worried that a rush to enroll in the last few days could overwhelm the federal enrollment Web site to the point that it runs slowly or doesn't work at all.

That's what happened in November.

"We had 180 people scheduled for an enrollment event at Beaumont Hospital," said Louanne Bakk, director of access and benefits assistance at the Area Agency on Aging 1B office in Southfield. "We were only able to enroll four."

Luckily, that was at the start of the enrollment period, so the agency could help those people at a later date. But after May 15, it's too late.

"We're not going to be able to assist people on May 16," Bakk said.

At an enrollment event last week, she said, errors on the Web site slowed the enrollment process. If that happens on the 15th, it could determine whether people are able to enroll. On average, it takes about 45 minutes to complete enrollment.

The federal agency that manages the new Medicare drug benefit said it has addressed the early enrollment problems with improvements to the Web site, www.medicare.gov, and has added more phone counselors at 800-633-4227 to help people enroll.

The hotline is open 24 hours a day.

But counselors and even Medicare officials said they hope people who want to enroll don't test the system.

"We have counselors on hand and the phones covered, but you can't be guaranteed you will get through if you wait," Johnson said.

"It makes sense to go ahead and make these decisions now," said Medicare spokesman Robert Herskovitz. "Things happen in everybody's life that could interfere with last-minute enrollment plans."

Contact **KATIE MERX** at 313-222-8762 or kmerx@freepress.com.

HOW TO ENROLL

- Call Medicare at 800-633-4227, visit www.medicare.gov or call the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program at 800-803-7174.

You'll need:

- Your Medicare card
- Your list of medications, including frequency and dosage
- Your pharmacy's name

Technology allows home treatment for more patients, lower costs

Sunday, May 07, 2006

By Sarah Kellogg
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Technology can make your bedroom almost as sophisticated a health care setting as the local hospital.

Thanks to video-conferencing, wireless Internet networks and high-tech monitors, ailing patients can stay in their own homes -- often at a savings -- and still receive high-quality care.

"Telemedicine is actually coming into its own," said John Rother, a spokesman for the AARP, the nation's largest seniors group. "The technology is there. It's just that the health-care system isn't organized very well to take advantage of it quite yet, but once it does, it will save money and provide a lot of peace of mind for patients and their families."

Telehealth (or telemedicine) isn't new. Physicians have been using technology to transfer medical records or consult with distant specialists for years, but recent advances in monitoring and telecommunications allow patients to track blood pressure, weight, blood sugar and pulse rate daily, then transfer the data to home health agencies via the Web or by telephone.

The data is evaluated daily by agency staffers who look for trends that spell trouble, such as elevated weight from bloating in cardiac patients or high blood sugar levels in diabetics. The best candidates for these monitoring programs are individuals with chronic heart or lung problems or diabetes.

Most of the state's about 220 certified home health care agencies are using some form of technological assistance, whether it be advanced monitors or the telephone, in addition to periodic nurses visits to care for patients.

"Our home nurses are only seeing those patients at a particular time on a particular day," said Ann Brissette, administrator of Bronson Home Health, a home health agency affiliated with Bronson Healthcare Group in Kalamazoo. "The monitor lets us see the patient every day to know what's really going on."

Brissette says monitoring a patient's daily progress is important since many patients are being discharged from hospitals just days after heart attacks and major surgeries. With those acute conditions, a delay of a day or two in spotting a problem can mean hospital readmission or death.

The monitors themselves are varied, ranging from the advanced variety that prompts patients with an electronic voice to weigh themselves or take their blood pressure to systems where patients record pertinent health information on a daily log then call in results.

Patients who participate in electronic monitoring programs are evaluated to determine whether they can work the equipment and comply with medical protocols. After they're eligible, they are trained by technicians to work a particular machine.

This technology doesn't come cheap. The Visiting Nurses Association of Southeast Michigan spends \$300,000 to operate about 150 monitoring units in clients' homes. It says that none of those dollars are reimbursed by the government, insurers or clients. The agency serves individuals in Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties.

"Our hope is that as an industry we can continue to demonstrate how it helps us provide better patient care," said Gloria Brooks, VNA's chief executive officer. "It is more proactive for them, and it is cost effective in the long term for them to pay for telehealth services."

Home health agencies say they can only afford to pick up these costs for so long, especially when they don't benefit from the savings.

"The (insurers) are seeing reduced readmissions to hospitals because of these monitoring programs," said Teri Aldini, home health project manager for MPRO, Michigan's Healthcare Quality Improvement Organization, a federally funded agency. "Reduced readmissions means fewer hospital stays. That saves money."

State officials acknowledge the agencies' dilemma -- government leaders are encouraging the use of technology in home-care settings and then not reimbursing agencies that use it. They predict that the answer will have to come from Congress.

"These programs are saving money, but the laws that govern Medicare and Medicaid aren't written to reimburse them," said Janet Olszewski, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health. "The only people who can change that are in Congress, and I think you can argue that it's important those laws be changed."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has established an Office for the Advancement of Telehealth to encourage the use of telehealth by sharing information about specific technologies that are available and opening a discussion with medical providers.

While front-line workers say telehealth holds promise in cost savings and access, it also allows patients to participate in their own care.

"We need to empower patients," said Patricia Hollins, director of the cardiac recovery program at Advanced Professional Home Health, a certified home-care agency with offices in Flint, Grand Rapids and Troy. "We feel empowering patients is essential. It gets them more interested in their care and their health and it decreases their anxiety."

'She just wanted to be a wife and mother'

By Debra Haight, For The Michigan City News-Dispatch

May 4, 2006

Shooting victim's family says they didn't know she was in so much danger

NILES, Mich. - Relatives knew that Tonya Goble-Studer and her husband weren't getting along, but they never suspected it would end in violent death.

"Everyone is still in shock like I am," said Alfred Goble, Goble-Studer's father.

Authorities said Goble-Studer and her mother, Vickyann Winslow Dewey, were shot to death at the older woman's Chikaming Township house last Friday.

Goble-Studer's husband, Gary Studer II, 31, has been charged with murder and is in the Berrien County Jail.

"This all happened out of the blue," said Goble, a Niles resident. "... I didn't know him too well, but I wouldn't expect him to be violent."

However, Goble-Studer's brother, Ted Goble of Niles, said some relatives considered him violent.

"We knew he was violent, but there was nothing we could do until she was ready to get away," he said. "We feel so badly now. Hindsight is definitely 20-20."

"If we had truly thought she was in danger, we would have tried to prevent it. She allowed it to go on and on. She was an adult, and we couldn't dictate to her, and by the time she realized it, it was too late."

Reports indicate Studer followed his wife from their house near Michigan City, to his mother-in-law's Lakeside, Mich., house. He allegedly shot and killed both women and tried to abduct the couple's two young sons before police arrived at the scene. The children, ages 3

months and 3 years old, were put in temporary foster care.

Ted said he's glad Studer's bond has been set at \$4 million so he can't get out of jail and try to flee. He said he knew little about Studer's past but understood he was on disability after a car accident 10 years ago.

Ted and his father said they are concerned about reports Goble-Studer tried to call 911 in LaPorte County about an hour before the shootings but received no help. The elder Goble said he has contacted a lawyer and is considering suing LaPorte County.

Alfred Goble described his daughter as just a "very nice person" who grew up wanting to be a homemaker, to get married and have a family. He said his daughter quit River Valley High School when she was in 11th grade and had been going back to school to get her high school diploma.

"She just wanted to be a wife and mother," he said. "She was always happy, and she loved children."

He said Friday's incident came as a shock to everyone, though family members knew the couple separated a month ago. The two had had a five-year relationship and had married last summer.

Goble said Goble-Studer, 23, was the youngest of his five children. He was never married to Dewey, 52.

Ted said he and his wife, Jennifer, began talking about adopting his two young nephews Friday night, soon after they learned what had happened to her and her mother. He said he hoped to pick up the children to take home to live with him and his family. Ted said he hopes to raise the children alongside his own three daughters, ages 14, 12, and 10.

"Our daughters are excited about having them come to live with us," he said. "My wife and I both knew that it was the only thing we could do," he said. "We both immediately knew what we both wanted to do and what we needed to do. Unfortunately, we weren't there for her at the end, but we can be there for her boys."

He said it was fortunate that he and his wife had just built a five-bedroom house. He said his wife runs a licensed day care business in their home and will be able to take care of the two youngsters.

He described his sister as someone who was "pretty outgoing" and "definitely loved her kids."

"She led a little bit of a wild life. Unfortunately, she ended up paying for

it with her life.”

Ted said the situation is “almost surreal. You always hear about it happening to someone else. It's happening to other people. It can't happen to you and you can't believe it when it does happen.”

Woman arrested after boyfriend's killing Police think stabbing followed argument

Monday, May 08, 2006

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A 29-year-old Ypsilanti Township woman was arrested early today in the stabbing death of her longtime boyfriend during an argument in their home, authorities said.

The couple's four children - ages 8, 6, 4 and 2 - were all home at the time, but it's unclear if they witnessed anything, Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler said.

Deputies were called to the couple's home in the 6900 block of McKean Road in the Swan Creek manufactured home community at 12:11 a.m., and found the wounded, 34-year-old David Allen Clark inside. He was transported to St. Joseph Mercy Hospital and pronounced dead an hour later.

Egeler said police believe Clark and his girlfriend were in an argument when the stabbing occurred. The suspect, whose name was not released, was arrested at the scene and lodged at the Washtenaw County Jail.

The woman is expected to be arraigned on a murder charge Tuesday. Egeler said police did not have a record of any previous calls to the home involving the couple, but he said he believed they had not lived at that residence for long.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or

734-994-6832.

Unger despondent before wife's death, attorney tells court

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEULAH — Florence Unger was determined to leave her husband after his treatment for drug, alcohol and gambling addictions, a witness said Friday during Mark Unger's trial on a first-degree murder charge.

"She never wavered ... never thought of reconciling," Ada Snyder Kerwin, a divorce lawyer who represented Florence Unger, testified in Benzie County Circuit Court.



M. Unger

The 37-year-old Huntington Woods woman filed for divorce in August 2003. A couple of months later, her body was found at the edge of Lower Herring

Lake in northern Michigan, where her family was staying at the Watervale resort.

Investigators believe she was pushed or fell from a rooftop deck to a concrete pad 12 feet below at night, and her husband moved her body into the water to stage an accident, causing her to drown.

Unger has pleaded not guilty. His attorneys say the death was accidental and resulted from head injury.

Both sides agree the Ungers'

marriage was troubled, although the defense insists Mark Unger loved his wife and could not have harmed her.

Kerwin said Mark Unger fought the divorce and in one legal filing argued the relationship could be salvaged.

He successfully underwent a five-month treatment program, but afterward seemed to substitute rehabilitation activities for substance abuse, Kerwin said.

Mark Unger was unemployed and told his wife he would try to gain custody of their two sons, Kerwin said.

"She was concerned about Mark getting custody since he wasn't working and she was," Kerwin testified.

Mark Unger seemed despondent during a meeting with attorneys and a court referee four days before Florence Unger's death, Kerwin said.

Also Friday, defense attorney Robert Harrison grilled sheriff's deputy Troy Packard about his testimony that Unger had behaved strangely after his wife's body was found the morning of Oct. 25, 2003.

Packard said Unger was in a hurry to leave the resort and already had packed his sport utility vehicle, including wet clothing that he apparently had tried to conceal.

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Heart on her sleeve

Monday, May 08, 2006

ERIN ALBERTY
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Sonya T. Cottingham feels her life through the rooms it inhabits.

Furniture, colors, decorations, shapes -- Cottingham connects to these memories the way other people connect to smells.

At 19, she can barely remember the first assault more than a decade ago. But she knows it's back there because of how she feels about bunk beds.

It's more than the low enclosure, the four posts that lock the top to the bottom, the bars of a ladder crawling up the side.

A very long nightmare sleeps on that mattress.

Men started touching Cottingham when she was 8. The rapes followed. Her mother found out too late.

Tragedy is part of the wallpaper in child protection and juvenile justice. A youth doesn't end up in either system unless something has gone horribly amiss.

But outside those walls, finding a place to hang that trauma becomes increasingly difficult. In addition to losing a lot of the support they had access to as minors -- health insurance, caseworkers, rehabilitative treatment -- youths who grow too old for state care must find their footing while carrying baggage that doesn't fit easily into the adult world.

Acting out

Cottingham has lived at the Innerlink Transitional Living Center, 1110 Howard in Saginaw, since a van dropped her off at a homeless shelter two days after her 19th birthday. That was the end of her term at a group foster care home in Saginaw County.

She considered returning to her mother in Detroit but decided it was time to make her own way. Cottingham hadn't lived at home since she was 16. She'd skipped school and run away, so police officers put her in juvie for a second time.

The first time, she was 14 and seldom in her own bedroom. Her father had never lived with her and stopped visiting when she was in middle school. Other men in her Detroit neighborhood were more willing to show affection. She turned to "the thuggish guys," she says -- the ones who just started following her around when her body changed.

She had her first "voluntary" sexual experience, as she calls it, at 11.

Her mother banned dating. Cottingham stopped coming home at night.

Her first stay in a juvenile home lasted about a month, right up to the day her roommate told a lie about her.

"I flipped the dresser, I got back all the stuff I made for her and ripped all her other stuff, I flipped the bunk bed so the top bunk was on the bottom," she recounts. "Man, I destroyed that room."

The staff threatened to call the police. Cottingham and seven other girls already had discussed running away.

"We like, 'Skip it. We bounce.'"

The girls, 14 to 16, ran for the streets. A man in his 20s pulled his car to the curb.

"He grabbed two girls, took our stuff and promised to come back and get us," Cottingham recalls.

She never saw him again.

The remaining girls disappeared one by one as they hitchhiked through Detroit.

Cottingham looked around and reached a conclusion that would push her off the empty streets and into darker places: I have nowhere to go and no one to turn to.

Tough cases

If Jean Traxler has learned one thing in more than a decade of social work, it's that a lot of good intentions get lost somewhere between trust and submission.

You can't help a kid unless he's willing to accept both, she says, and for many of the children she sees as a caseworker with Saginaw County's Department of Human Services, trusting and submitting to adults are measures that haven't always served them well.

That may leave them with little more than vacant stares and back-talk for the counselors, teachers, relatives, neighbors, pastors and state caseworkers who could intervene.

"A lot of these kids won't go back to their support people until they hit bottom," Traxler says.

Even then, "support people" may offer little sanctuary.

"Some of the kids were molested by their family members, by their church members, even by church elders," says Archibald Lawrence, a counselor who coordinates transitional living services for the young adults who come to Innerlink.

Still others are angry or paranoid or feel so worthless they don't believe anyone will want to stick by them -- more consequences of abuse. Or they simply are acting like teenagers.

"A lot of it is the system, and a lot of it is kids who don't make good decisions and don't want help from adults," says Ann Shea, who supervises childrens' caseworkers for the county.

'House to house'

On her own at 14, Cottingham "went from house to house." That's her expression. Strangers are willing to take in a teenage girl, she learned, but not for nothing.

"It was hard," she says quietly.

Cottingham went home after three months, when a man broke her nose with his fist, but she returned to the street a few weeks later. This time, a 26-year-old woman befriended her. Then they became more than friends.

Bisexuality never was complicated for Cottingham. No guys ever had a problem with the other girls, and she dumped any girls who had a problem with the other guys.

"Sometimes they call people like that greedy. All we want is to be loved," she says. "That's how I was then."

When she wasn't working house to house, Cottingham danced at a club. She was 15, she says, but it's easy to convince someone you're older if that's what they want to believe.

"It kept the money coming," she explains.

The money came for another year or so. Then the relationship hit the skids, and she went home again the week after her 16th birthday.

Her mom tried to throw her a Sweet Sixteen party. Cottingham said no, even though she'd secretly dreamed of her Sweet Sixteen since she was a little girl. She just didn't feel up to it.

A couple months later, she was in and out again, skipping school and fighting with her mother, who took her to the police station.

Eureka!

In working with Saginaw County's wounded families, caseworker Traxler has seen enough kids make bad decisions to know it's unproductive to blame anyone else.

"I try to instill in them that the things that happened to them, they don't have to let that affect their tomorrows," she says.

But Traxler also has seen enough dramatic transformations to know there is more behind a bad decision than a bad child.

She points to a Saginaw County 17-year-old sexually abused as a child who became a sex offender himself. For years, he refused to acknowledge he'd been wronged. He moved through more than a dozen foster homes before undergoing intensive, specialized therapy.

"It was like, 'Eureka,'" Traxler says.

His anger drained away. Within a year and a half, the teen raised his grades from Ds and below to Bs. Now he's looking at college.

When therapy works

Cottingham's first epiphany occurred in an office with dark brown walls.

At the desk sat the 13th counselor she had seen that year. The 12 previous offices may as well have been empty rooms.

"I wasn't comfortable. I didn't want to tell them my story," she says.

This one was different. The room, that is.

"The walls was like a feeling to me," she says. "It had that certain color, and there was all these cute little pictures with words, like 'Be yourself' and 'You're not alone.' It actually made me feel like I was at home."

Cottingham spilled tears and humiliating, terrible stories to the dark brown walls and the woman sitting in front of them.

After that, Cottingham slowed down. She says she started to control her anger and follow more of the rules.

At 19, the state moved her to St. Vincent Home, where she started group therapy. As the girls talked out their pasts, she heard many twisted versions of a familiar narrative.

"The majority of the group had been sexually abused. So I was like, 'Dang, OK. I'll tell my story.'"

She says it took her two weeks to get through it, what with all the crying.

Uphill climb

For most abuse victims, one "eureka" moment won't repair all the parts of their lives that have spun out of control.

"There isn't a human being alive who hasn't had psychological scars," says Shea, the county's foster care supervisor. "But (neglected and abused children) have an uphill battle much more than the 'average' child. It's possible to get through it -- it just takes a lot of support."

If they still blame themselves or can't face the memories of their abusers or forever see themselves as powerless victims, she says, the abuse will infect their lives for the long term.

The symptoms and effects of abuse often are the very forces standing in the way of recovery, Lawrence observes of those who come to Innerlink. Anti-social or angry people aren't poised to begin forming positive relationships. Flashbacks to abusive situations may leave them more afraid to confront their pasts.

"There's one ... who still wets the bed," he says. "That's gotta be traumatic in itself."

Others arrive with disorders that likely existed before they were abused or removed from their parents, he says.

"Most of these young adults have been diagnosed with (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), we've had kids that have been diagnosed as bipolar, some of them have learning disabilities, some can't read as well as others," Lawrence says. "Therefore, they need extra help, extra attention."

Designing her future

Cottingham is not a withdrawn, angry victim; if a hug took on human form, it probably would act a lot like her.

It's not just her gregarious demeanor -- the big gestures, the booming laugh, the ease with which she delivers high fives and handshakes and shoulder squeezes to the others in a

foster kids' support group she attends at Hoyt Library every other week.

It's partly the little things: giving her worksheets to the members who come in late or shushing the protests that erupt when one group member wants to listen to Metallica.

But mostly, it's the heart-on-her-sleeve openness of a 19-year-old who writes a poem about growing into adulthood, reads it to a roomful of teenagers, stumbles over the words, has to start over again and doesn't get embarrassed.

"I guess there's just a part of me that says just because one person did this does not mean you have to put this on everybody else," she says.

Romantic relationships are more difficult territory; Cottingham has had six of them since she went on her own in July.

"Every relationship teaches you something different," she says.

Cottingham met her present boyfriend at the Mackinaw Academy in Saginaw Township, where she is set to graduate this spring.

Cottingham keeps souvenirs in her room at Innerlink from almost everyone she has ever known. A picture of her mother sits on the dresser. They talk every week. On the bulletin board hangs a handmade valentine from her father, who says he wants to make things right with her as soon as he gets out of prison for a sexual assault he insists he didn't commit.

In the corner is a birthday card her therapy group at St. Vincent's made a few days before she aged out of the program.

"I cried when they gave me that."

On the windowsill is her "Student of the Month" award from the Mackinaw Academy. After school, she works at a car wash -- "My first job!" she cheers.

She desperately wants to paint her walls a deep blue, the same shade she successfully lobbied for when Innerlink repainted the hallway. Colors speak to Cottingham, and she speaks back in the crafts she's made over the years. They mix bright oranges and yellows with drab tones -- brown, gray, black and "poo-poo green."

"I take the ugliest colors and make it so pretty," she says.

Cottingham is looking at Delta and Baker colleges for next year. She wants to take anything that will get her a career in interior design.

She figures if anyone understands what goes into a room, she does. v

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

None in community need be hungry, homeless unless they choose

Monday, May 8, 2006

By Michael Brown and Kalamazoo Gospel Mission Board of Directors

The recent media coverage of events relating to Kalamazoo's homeless, and what some claim is inadequate service or mistreatment by area shelter providers, has given us, as the Board of Directors of the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, a desire to share with Kalamazoo Gazette readers the truth of everyday life at the mission.

This subject is very dear to our hearts, as our vision is to establish and maintain the highest standards of spiritual and programming excellence while providing shelter for the homeless and feeding them physically, mentally and spiritually.

A few months ago, a group of homeless people were removed from what used to be Stock Building Supply property on Edwards Street. Of the 16 people who were removed, 14 were not staying at shelters because they chose not to use the services available. The reasons they gave included not wanting to do chores, not wanting to respect the curfew rules of the shelter and not wanting religion forced on them.

It was not that there were no shelters available to them. On the contrary, they did not want to follow the rules of shelters like the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission which would have received them with open arms if they would have been willing to abide by the simple rules in place. Rules, policies and curfews are necessary in all of life and bring order to situations that would otherwise be chaotic and unsafe for the majority of people involved.

The Kalamazoo Gospel Mission operates on Biblical principles as we understand them. We provide services to anyone regardless of race, religion, sexual preference or anything else. We reserve the right to pray before meals and have devotions with those staying at the mission. Persons staying at the mission must attend the devotions if they desire to eat. The general public, not staying at the mission, can come in at the end of devotions to eat.

In this debate, there are those who are losing sight of the big picture. The vast majority of homeless have warm beds and delicious meals. We feed an average of 450 to 500 people every day, most of whom are truly grateful for the opportunity to receive a very good meal and have a warm, safe place to sleep. On average, more than 150 people sleep at the mission each night. Our clients appreciate the financial support, volunteer hours and gifts in kind that come from all over Michigan to support this and other similar ministries.

Why should the City Commission and Kalamazoo residents have to continue to hear from the few who choose not to partake? The number of homeless who are benefiting from the generosity of private donors who support this and other shelters is countless.

Since the beginning of 2006, we have graduated seven men from our long-term men's discipleship program. Some of them are employed here at the Gospel Mission while others have found employment elsewhere. We have 30 men and 17 women and children enrolled in the long-term programs at this time. They are men and women who have made a commitment to be part of their own life-changing experience.

Each week we assist homeless individuals and families in finding their own apartments or homes. There are innumerable stories of men and women who are changing their lives through assistance from the Gospel Mission and other similar organizations, but who do not get the press that a small group who has challenged the City Commission commands.

The shelters and service providers across this city provide enough meals that no one needs to go hungry unless they choose to. Even if an individual is barred from one shelter for dinner, they will not have to wait long for meal hours at another provider.

In the midst of this debate we, at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, continue to work one day at a time seeking to be Christ's hands and feet to Kalamazoo.

Members of the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission's Board of Directors are Franklin VanOosten, board chairman; Scott Mulder, vice chairman; Rev. Michael L. Brown, executive director; and board members Liz DeVries, Ervin Armstrong, Ralph Robertson, Charles Clark, Ken Goodenough, Charles Hines, Daniel Cunningham, Hugh Meints, John Zull and Dan Boot.

Organization collects 'loveys' for needy kids

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By JANIE MAGRUDER

Gannett News Service

Think back to when you were a child and had your cherished lovey — a stuffed animal, blanket or doll — without which you couldn't, wouldn't, fall asleep.

Perhaps it's still on your bed or dresser, threadbare or missing a button eye, or packed away in a closet, but nearby just in case.

Creating that sense of security in children whose lives have been turned upside down by domestic violence and homelessness is the aim of Project Night Night. Founded by Kendra Stitt Robins,

a San Francisco mom and former attorney, the year-old nonprofit is helping children get a better night's sleep.

"Homeless children rarely own a teddy bear, a security blanket or a book," Robins says. "They live on the streets or in shelters without the items of comfort that most American children enjoy nightly."

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, an estimated 1.3 million American children are homeless. Of those, 42 percent are ages 4 and younger.

Robins' project involves volunteers who have gathered and delivered about 3,000 packages containing more than 11,000 items to children ages 10 and under who live in 39 shelters in 12 states.

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An estimated 1.3 million American children are homeless. Of those, 42 percent are ages 4 and younger.

One is Save the Family, a Mesa, Ariz.-based organization with 146 housing units. They're filled to capacity with families, mostly women and children who are victims of domestic violence, says Tim Lidster, community development director of the organization.

The first of 50 small canvas bags, stuffed with cute little bears and lambs, soft blankets, age-appropriate books and toys, toothbrushes and toothpaste, will be distributed soon.

"We want to provide them with a new beginning," he says. "Something like these bags is just a nice start to that."

Word of Project Night Night has spread around the country, Robins says. Help also cropped up from Mattel and Hasbro, which have donated toys, and from Robins' college friends and parents of friends. She thinks it's because everyone can relate to the need for comfort. Then there was the teacher in Ypsilanti.

"The school's in a poorer neighborhood, but a teacher locked onto this and told her students about it, and they are kids who don't really have a lot," she says. "But they have provided a lot of donations."

Online

► www.projectnightnight.org
Project Night Night

Conning Seniors

Financial abuse of elderly is increasing as the U.S. population grows older

كس BY EILEEN ALT POWELL 5/8
Associated Press

NEW YORK — As the U.S. population ages, the elderly are becoming a prime target for financial abuse.

Sometimes the thief is a stranger who befriends a lonely senior. Other times it's a caregiver with sticky fingers, a telemarketer with "found money" to share or a member of the senior's family who takes advantage of his or her declining mindfulness.

The National Center on Elder Abuse, a Washington, D.C., clearinghouse for elder rights advocates, estimates there may be 5 million victims a year.

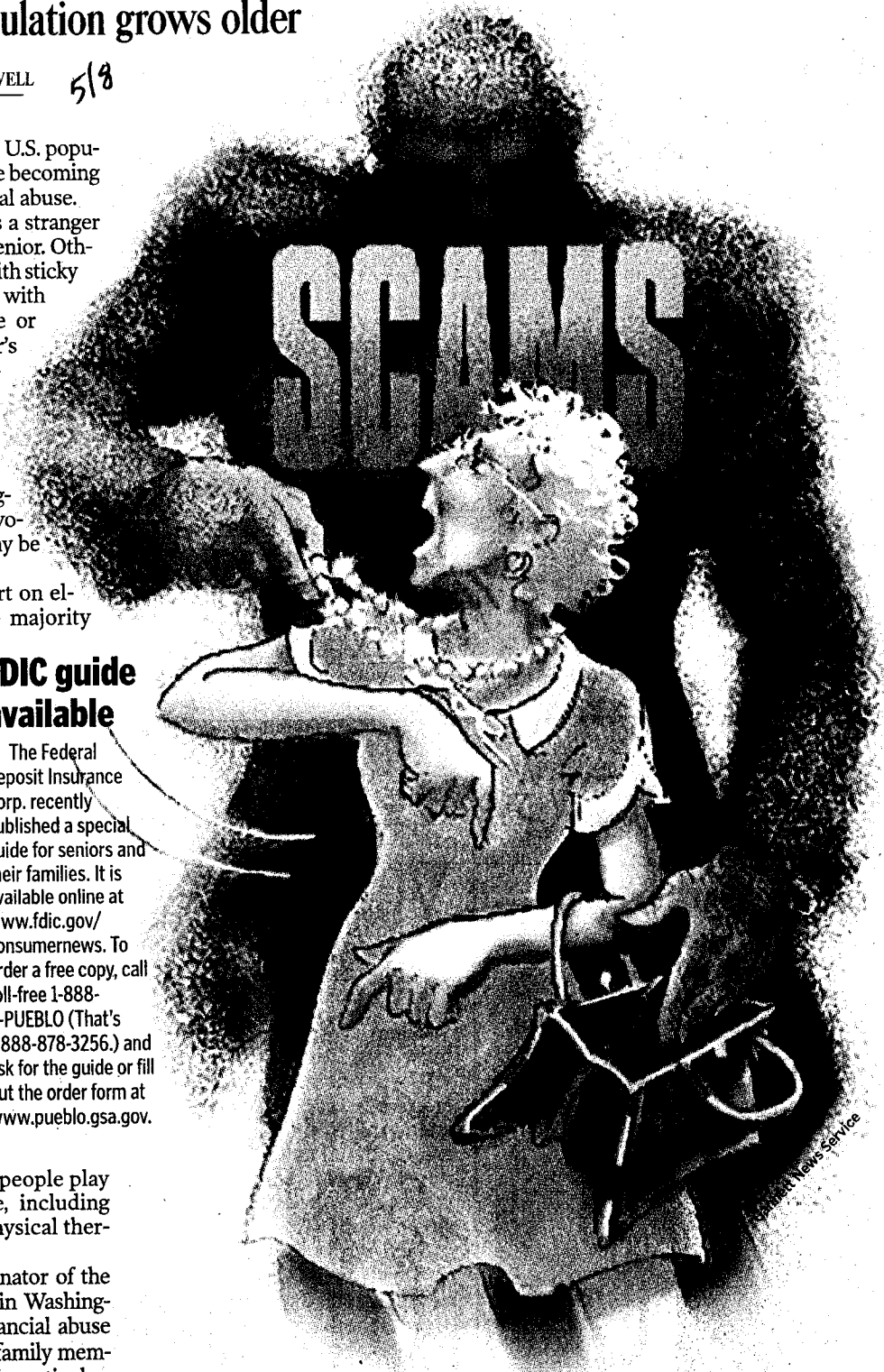
Linda Eagle, an expert on elder abuse, believes the majority of cases go unreported. "Some of the elderly never know they've been scammed," she said. "Those who do are often too embarrassed to talk about it. Or they're afraid if they let on to their families, ... they'll take away their independence."

Larry Meigs, chief executive of the Visiting Angels in-home care service franchise in Havertown, Pa., said that families need to be aware of how many different people play roles in a senior's life, including caregivers, cleaners, physical therapists and repairmen.

Bob Blancato, coordinator of the Elder Justice Coalition in Washington, D.C., said elder financial abuse often is perpetrated by family members, and that this form is particularly difficult to uncover and punish.

FDIC guide available

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. recently published a special guide for seniors and their families. It is available online at www.fdic.gov/consumernews. To order a free copy, call toll-free 1-888-8-PUEBLO (That's 1-888-878-3256.) and ask for the guide or fill out the order form at www.pueblo.gsa.gov.



AP Wirephoto Service

Signs that a senior may be experiencing financial abuse

The National Center on Elder Abuse points out that financial abuse can take many forms but generally involves the "illegal taking, misuse or concealment of funds, property or assets."

Linda Eagle, an elder advocate who works with banks, said that some "red flags" that a senior is being victimized include:

- ▶ **Sudden changes** in an elder's banking practices
- ▶ **Uncharacteristic** and unexplained withdrawals of large sums by an elder or someone with power of



attorney

- ▶ **Large credit card** transactions or checks written to unusual recipients, including "salesman" or "cash"

- ▶ **Abrupt changes** in a will or other financial documents
- ▶ **Sudden transfer** of assets to a family member or acquaintance without a reasonable explanation
- ▶ **Complaints of stolen** or misplaced credit cards or Social Security and pension checks
- ▶ **New signatories** added to an elder's account

Bob Blancato, coordinator of the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, said other signs of trouble may include:

- ▶ **A recent acquaintance**, especially anyone who suddenly takes up residence with an elderly person who had been living alone
- ▶ **Redirection** of an older person's mail to another address
- ▶ **Disconnect notices** from utilities — or an eviction notice — against an elderly person who shouldn't be having financial problems
- ▶ **A senior's willingness** to give out Social Security numbers and other information to telemarketers and other callers

Seniors learning to avoid scams

Monday, May 8, 2006

By Rex Hall Jr.

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

Charlene Dykehouse trashes ``junk mail" that looks the least bit suspicious and hangs up on phone solicitors before they can even start a pitch.

``I'm so anti-salesman, I don't know how I'd ever get scammed," said the 67-year-old from Marcellus.

More seniors should be so vigilant, say law-enforcement officials and consumer-protection groups. Seniors such as Dykehouse often are the targets of scams to steal personal information and money.

``A lot of times, individuals in that age range are more susceptible to scams," said Margaret Rost, a regulation agent for the Consumer Protection Division of the Michigan Attorney General's Office.

``They were raised in a generation that was a lot more trustworthy ... and they rely on other people being trustworthy," she said.

Sixty percent of the complaints about suspected telemarketing scams nationwide last year were by residents 60 and older, said Rost, who will be among speakers here Wednesday at a free, half-day conference for seniors.

``Safe, Sound and Secure," now in its fifth year, will feature workshops on subjects including identity theft, personal safety, prescription medications, financial exploitation, alternatives to guardianship and Internet safety.

No agency collects comprehensive statistics on the number of senior citizens who fall victim to scams, according to Anita Salustro, associate director for consumer affairs with AARP Michigan. But several schemes thriving today have been around for years.

A Nigerian letter scam, which promises a portion of a large sum of money from a bogus government official and asks for personal information or money, is still prevalent. So are foreign lotteries that woo consumers with fake winnings they're told they can obtain by paying a processing fee.

Detective Sgt. Mike Spring, of the Michigan State Police in Paw Paw, said his agency regularly receives reports of residents scammed by foreign lotteries. Others report they have had money stolen by a family member or caregiver.

That was the case for Louis Melnick's mother, a former Kalamazoo resident, Melnick said. Melnick says his niece, Patricia Brown, who cared for his mother and took care of finances for the 88-year-old, passed a \$5,000 credit-card check in his mother's name without permission.

Soon, the credit-card provider was calling to seek repayment, he said. Eventually, charges were sought against Brown, 41, who pleaded guilty in 2003 to forgery and was placed on probation and ordered to pay \$5,305 in restitution.

The Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office receives five to six cases monthly involving senior citizens. The majority of those cases, said Gloria Swinsick, a victim advocate, involves the theft of money.

Seniors also must beware of contractor scams, Swinsick said. In spring and summer, bogus contractors target senior citizens, offering to work on a house, then collect their pay and leave before completing the job.

Ken Vander Meeden, president of the Western Michigan Better Business Bureau, said many seniors are reluctant to tell law enforcement or family members they have been scammed for fear of embarrassment or appearing incompetent.

Vander Meeden said BBB officials often hear from senior scam victims when the organization hosts workshops on the issue. He said the region's large senior-citizen population makes Southwest Michigan a hot target for phone, mail and Internet scams.

People 65 and older make up about 15 percent of the population in the area. That figure outpaces the national average of about 12 percent, Vander Meeden said. He added that many senior citizens in the area are retired and have received lucrative retirement and pension packages, which can entice thieves.

The Internet has given con artists a powerful vehicle for obtaining money and personal identity information.

AARP officials say one of the most common scams is called ``phishing," in which a consumer receives an official-looking bogus e-mail asking them to update or validate their credit-card billing information or their Social Security number.

Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Fink said he expects the number of senior-citizen fraud cases to rise sharply in the next 15 years given that many baby boomers will become senior citizens during that time.

Students raise money for soup kitchen

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

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FLINT- A group of about 15 Schools of Choice students raised money for the North End Soup Kitchen with a fashion show held late last month, teacher Myrah Davis said.

With a matching donation from dentist Christopher Ford in Flint Township, the program raised about \$370, Davis said.

The donation is expected to be presented to the soup kitchen soon. Money will be used to buy personal items such as deodorant or shampoo, Davis said.

Wife pleads guilty in scam

Saturday, May 06, 2006

By Steven Hepker
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Following her husband's lead, a Jackson woman admitted Friday she pretended to be a Hurricane Katrina victim to sting the American Red Cross for \$1,565.

"Me and my husband went to the Red Cross and asked for aid," Jennifer Miner told Circuit Judge Chad Schmucker. She pleaded guilty to one count of obtaining money by false pretenses in September.

Schmucker on Wednesday sentenced Mark J. Miner to 90 days in jail, with credit for 65 days already served. He also must serve 90 days on the sheriff's work program.

Schmucker will sentence Jennifer Miner on June 14. The conviction carries a maximum five-year prison term, but Schmucker said Miner pleaded on the understanding she faces no more than a month in prison.

Her husband was ordered to reimburse the Red Cross office in Jackson. Jennifer Miner will share in the responsibility to pay back the agency.

The couple had lived in Mississippi but moved to Jackson in June when their house trailer was repossessed, investigators said. The hurricane hit in late August. The Miners sought emergency aid and received \$1,565 from the Red Cross and \$2,500 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Assistant Prosecutor Nick Mehalco Jr. said the federal government apparently will not prosecute over the \$2,500.

America's 'Near Poor' Are Increasingly at Economic Risk, Experts Say

By ERIK ECKHOLM
The New York Times

Published: May 8, 2006

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Abbotts date their tailspin to a collapse in demand for the aviation-related electronic parts that Stephen sold in better times, when he earned about \$40,000 a year.

He lost his job in late 2001, unemployment benefits ran out over the next year and he and his wife, Laurie, along with their teenage son, were evicted from their apartment.

They spent a year in a borrowed motor home here in the working-class interior of Orange County, followed by eight months in a motel room with a kitchenette. During that time, Ms. Abbott, a diabetic who is now 51, lost all her teeth and could not afford to replace them.

"Since I didn't have a smile," she recalled, "I couldn't even work at a checkout counter."

Americans on the lower rungs of the economic ladder have always been exposed to sudden ruin. But in recent years, with the soaring costs of housing and medical care and a decline in low-end wages and benefits, tens of millions are living on even shakier ground than before, according to studies of what some scholars call the "near poor."

"There's strong evidence that over the past five years, record numbers of lower-income Americans find themselves in a more precarious economic position than at any time in recent memory," said Mark R. Rank, a sociologist at Washington University in St. Louis and the author of "One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All."

In a rare study of vulnerability to poverty, Mr. Rank and his colleagues found that the risk of a plummet of at least a year below the official poverty line rose sharply in the 1990's, compared with the two previous decades. By all signs, he said, such insecurity has continued to worsen.

For all age groups except those 70 and older, the odds of a temporary spell of poverty doubled in the 1990's, Mr. Rank reported in a 2004 paper titled, "The Increase of Poverty Risk and Income Insecurity in the U.S. Since the 1970's," written with Daniel A. Sandoval and Thomas A. Hirschl, both of Cornell University.

For example, during the 1980's, around 13 percent of Americans in their 40's spent at least one year below the poverty line; in the 1990's, 36 percent of people in their 40's did, according to the analysis.

Comparable figures for this decade will not be available for several years, but other indicators — a climbing poverty rate and rising levels of family debt — suggest a deepening insecurity, poverty experts and economists say.

More people work in jobs without health coverage, including temporary or contract jobs that may offer no benefits or even access to unemployment insurance. Medicaid is offered to fewer adults (though to more children). Cash welfare benefits are harder to secure, and their real value has eroded.

About 37 million Americans lived below the federal poverty line in 2004, set at \$19,157 a year for a family of four. But far more people, another 54 million, were in households earning between the poverty line and double the poverty line.

"We don't track this group of people, and they are very vulnerable," said Katherine S. Newman, a sociologist at Princeton University who studies low-end workers.

Those suffering a nose-dive say the statistics do not begin to convey their fears and anguish.

Only a year ago, Machele Sauer thought she was entering the middle class. She and her husband, a licensed electrician, owned a large mobile home. He was starting his own business and Ms. Sauer, after bearing their fourth child, hoped to stop waitressing and be a stay-at-home mom.

"We were the ideal family, the envy of others," she said recently as she collected free food and diapers at the Hope Family Support Center, a small charity in Garden Grove, Calif., in Orange County. "And then, boom, everything flipped upside down."

Life fell apart last spring when her husband was arrested on theft charges, linked to a recent drug addiction she says she did not know about. Because of a prior record, he received a long prison sentence.

Now Ms. Sauer, 34, draws on the charity for goods and its director, Gayle Knight, for advice and emotional support, part of a grueling scramble to provide for her four daughters, ages 16 months, 8, 9 and 15. Many days over recent weeks, she dropped them at the baby sitter after school, worked the night shift as a waitress, picked up the sleeping children after midnight then woke up with the baby at 6:30 a.m. before preparing the older three for school.

At first she went on welfare, receiving \$600 a month along with paid child care and counseling for herself and the children. As she resumed waitress work—four night shifts and two day shifts a week—she earned about \$1,300 a month, which led her welfare payment to be cut to \$300.

She receives \$200 worth of food stamps that cover bills for just the first two weeks of each month, she said.

"Now the van is breaking down," she said. "With four kids it's really hard to hold a full-time job, and I need to make sure they do well in school." Her goal is to find a way to prepare for nursing school.

The Abbotts, too, sought aid from food banks and other charities, collecting weekly boxes of food and toiletries.

In Orange County, about 220,000 people received food from 400 local charities last year, according to the Second Harvest Food Bank, which distributes donations. Recipients include many families, often Hispanic, with several children and both parents working minimum-wage jobs. Over all, half the families seeking food had at least one working adult, according to a recent study by the food bank.

In the center of Orange County, a world away from its polished coastal towns, borderline poverty is common but seldom visible. On small streets behind strip malls and fast food restaurants, families, sometimes two of them, cram into small, aging bungalows.

What look like tourist motels along Beach Boulevard are mostly filled by working families or single people who stay for months or years, paying high weekly fees but unable to muster up-front money for an apartment rental.

Mr. Abbott, now 58, eventually found a lower-paying sales job. With help from church members, the couple amassed the three months' rent of \$2,700 required to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Anaheim.

Describing their last several years, Mr. Abbott kept circling back to the emotional toll. Motels, like the one they lived in for eight months for \$281 a week, are "dives," he said, "with lots of screaming and fighting and cops being called."

"It was really stressful," he said, "and still you pay a lot of money."

In a new setback, Mr. Abbott has developed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He recently had to stop working and go on state disability, which pays \$1,436 a month and gives him health coverage.

Ms. Abbott has no health insurance — if she gets sick, she says, she will go to a medical van that serves the homeless. But a generous dentist from church helped her get new teeth, and now she plans to hunt for work.

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Human Services Dodges Budget Cuts

May 6, 2006, 08:13 AM EDT



Lansing human service organizations will not suffer cuts this year. Mayor Virg Bernero had proposed cutting more than half the budget for the organizations, but a surplus of money from the Board of Water and Light changed the service group's fate.

The Loaves and Fishes shelter helps those in need. The shelter depends on Lansing for 17% of its budget, and the director just got news the shelter can depend on the city again.

Ramond Thibeault, Director of Loaves and Fishes: "I actually yelled with joy when I heard it on the radio this morning."

Earlier this week, the city received more than \$500,000 than expected from the Lansing Board of Water and Light. At City Hall, council members and the mayor agreed to give that money to human services. Thanks to that last-minute check from BWL, there will be no cuts to human services this year, and to ensure these cuts are not suggested in the future, city leaders may have to look to the Capitol for help.

A proposed bill would allow Lansing to have a donation checkoff on income tax forms. If taxpayers check yes for the donation, it will go toward human service groups like Loaves and Fishes, which Mayor Virg Bernero says could possibly keep human services safe from future cuts.

Virg Bernero, Lansing Mayor: "It is a structural solution, something that will be in law, it's something that will be there year after year once it's passed."

Many believe the checkoff will help raise much need money for these groups. The bill is expected to be introduced at the Capitol later this month.



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This Week APHA in Washington

For the week ending 5/5/2006, Vol. XXVII, No. 11

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House Budget Negotiations Continue

This week, the House leadership came closer to reaching an agreement that will bring the House fiscal year 2007 budget resolution, H.J. Res. 766, to the floor for passage. The resolution has been altered from the version passed by the Budget Committee last month to address concerns by both moderate Republicans and members of the Appropriations Committee. In particular, Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.), chair of the Appropriations Committee, agreed to move \$4 billion from Defense into the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education account so that programs under that account would be frozen at their current level rather than reduced as originally proposed. Both the Social Services Block Grant and the Community Services Block Grant had been targeted for reductions under the original draft resolution. The Budget Committee's version also included an \$837 billion cap on discretionary funding and reconciliation instructions for eight committees to find a total of \$6.8 billion in savings over five years in mandatory programs. Even if the House moves forward and passes its budget resolution, there is speculation that there will be no final resolution that addresses the differences between the House resolution and the Senate resolution. Therefore, each chamber will likely move forward with its own version, and agreements will be worked out during negotiations on the appropriations bills. In fact, this week the Senate Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee moved forward on its FY 2007 bill by holding a hearing with secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Michael Leavitt, to review the administration's recommendations.

House Hearing Highlights CMS-State Partnership on Part D

On May 3, the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee held a hearing on implementation of the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. The subcommittee's chair, Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.), commended Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Mark McClellan and his staff for their work to implement the Part D program and for taking full responsibility for addressing the transition challenges that have arisen. McClellan provided an update on the enrollment numbers and CMS' newest initiatives. He also discussed the agency's various partnerships, including with state Medicaid directors, and stressed that such partnerships have helped to eliminate the difficulties of enrollment for dual eligibles. When pressed by Representatives Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) and Mike Thompson (D-Calif.) about the timing of reimbursement to states that picked up the costs of prescriptions for dual eligibles, McClellan said that CMS had "developed a

framework and schedule for reimbursement with a bipartisan group of state Medicaid directors.” He added that states would get reimbursed as soon as they submitted the paperwork and that he expected the process to be completed by the end of June. Testimony from the hearing is available at <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=detail&hearing=478>.

House Appropriations Panel Funds Commodity Supplemental Food Program

On May 3, the House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee approved its version of the FY 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill. The measure includes \$118.3 million in funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which the Bush administration had targeted for elimination in its FY 2007 budget request. The budget plan had called for current CSFP recipients to be transferred to the Food Stamp Program (FSP), but did not specify how the transfer would have been accomplished. The budget measure appropriates \$37.9 billion for the FSP, about the same as the administration’s requested level and \$2.8 billion below last year. According to the budget request, FSP participation is estimated to be lower than the projected level for last year. Other appropriations in the bill include \$13.3 billion for Child Nutrition Programs and \$5.244 billion for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The full House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to take up the bill next week, and the Senate is expected to act on the measure after the May 29-June 2 recess. More information is available on the subcommittee’s web site at

[http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?](http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=596&Month=5&Year=2006)

[FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=596&Month=5&Year=2006](http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=596&Month=5&Year=2006).

Senators Introduce Legislation to Extend Farm Bill

On May 2, a bipartisan group of eight senators announced support for a bill, S. 2696, to extend the current farm bill until the World Trade Organization Doha round talks are concluded. The present farm bill, passed in 2002 and scheduled to expire in 2007, authorizes the FSP and other federal nutrition programs. The bill was introduced by Sens. Jim Talent (R-Mo.) and Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.). Other senators supporting the bill included Mark Pryor (D-Ark.), Chris Bond (R-Mo.), Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.), and David Vitter (R-La.). Earlier this year, several House members also expressed support for an extension; on February 16, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) introduced legislation (H.R. 4775) to delay the next farm bill until after implementing legislation for the Doha round is enacted into law (see [This Week, March 10](#)).

Supreme Court Issues Decision in Arkansas Medicaid Lien Case

On May 1, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (*Arkansas Department of Health & Human Services v. Ahlborn*) that federal Medicaid law does not authorize the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services (ADHS) to assert a lien on a Medicaid recipient’s settlement in an amount exceeding the amount of her medical expenses. The recipient, Heidi Ahlborn, had a settlement amount of \$35,581.47. The court said the federal anti-lien provision affirmatively prohibits ADHS from doing so. The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals previously held that Arkansas’ statutory lien was unenforceable, since it contravened federal law. Since other courts had upheld similar lien provisions, the Supreme Court granted certiorari (i.e., it chose to hear the case) and affirmed the 8th Circuit’s decision. Thus, states can take only a limited amount from the legal settlements of Medicaid beneficiaries as payment for medical expenses.

CMS Announces Extension for Part D Administrative Cost Reimbursement

On May 3, CMS announced an extension for federal reimbursement of the programming administrative costs associated with the Part D state reconciliation process. The extension applies to the 46 states with Section 402 demonstrations. The original May 5 deadline has been extended to June 30, 2006. Letters have been sent to the Medicaid director in each state participating in the waiver.

Bush Administration Reveals Pandemic Flu Preparedness Plan

On May 3, the Bush administration released its federal preparedness plan for a possible flu pandemic. The plan outlines responsibilities of various federal agencies and lays out the chain of command in a pandemic situation. According to the plan, HHS would be in charge of the public health response, and the Department of Homeland Security would be in charge of coordinating the federal response. The plan lists over 300 specific actions for which the federal government would be responsible, including support of containment efforts, guidance to state and local governments, procurement and distribution of vaccines and drugs, and accelerated drug research. It also calls for cooperation and activity from businesses and the private sector. The administration requested a total of \$7.1 billion for implementation of the plan. More information, including a full copy of the administration's plan, is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/pandemicflu/>.